DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 948 HE 016 286

TITLE	Use Your Mailbox To Go Back to School.
PUB DATE	Sep 83
NOTE	6p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	Changing Times; v37 n9 p67-71 Sep 1983
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Correspondence Schools; *Correspondence Study; Educational Trends; *External Degree Programs; Higher Education; Home Study; Postsecondary Education; Program Descriptions; *Proprietary Schools; Resource Materials; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	PF Project

ABSTRACT

Correspondence courses are a growing alternative to conventional on-campus courses. The main reasons that so many people choose this type of education are that it is more convenient, usually faster, and normally less expensive. There are two kinds of schools that offer correspondence courses: proprietary and postsecondary. Proprietary schools include privately owned, profit-making schools that provide home study courses of a technical or vocational nature. Postsecondary schools include public and private colleges and universities that offer home study courses, some of which lead to a degree. Although most proprietary and postsecondary schools are reputable, there are some which employ unethical practices. It is wise to investigate a school's accreditation or reputation before enrolling in courses. Both types of schools have accreditation agencies which can be contacted. If the goal is to earn a college degree, then correspondence courses may be combined with past credits and experience to earn an external degree. External degrees are growing in acceptance with employers and probably will be universally accepted in the near future. This document includes an annotated list of five books and pamphlets for more information about correspondence courses and external degrees. (DC)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

***Model yachts and section patterns** for full-size sailboats fill Curt Wright's workshop in Dundee, N.Y. A home study course from Yacht Design Institute of Blue Hill, Me., has enabled him to design and begin building two large boats as well as this 54-inch radio-controlled model. The model has subsidized the cost of his course: He's sold 45 kits to local yachting enthusiasts.*

Use your mailbox to go back to school

From accounting to zoology, there's little you can't learn through a correspondence course. Cost and convenience are the chief advantages.

FOR A BUSINESS once remembered for matchbook-cover advertising that promised to turn you into an artist, a private detective, a bartender or a ventriloquist, the home study industry is doing all right these days.

Some 200 of the Fortune 500 businesses use home study courses to train their employees. More than 2,000 students a day enroll in the U.S. Army's correspondence school. Many nationally recognized colleges and universities offer correspondence courses as an alternative to their on-campus curriculum.

In a nutshell, there are three main reasons so many people elect this type of education over conventional on-campus programs: It's more convenient, it's usually faster, and it's normally less expensive.

You can choose among more than 12,000 courses on subjects ranging from accounting to zoology. You can work toward a bachelor's degree, get a leg up in your job field or explore some new subject for the sheer enjoyment of it.

Some courses of study require only a few weeks to complete; others can take up to four years. In most cases you can set your pace within guidelines determined by the individual school.

The cost of a home study course ranges from no charge at all up to about $4,000. In general, tuition for college-credit courses ranges from $20 to $60 per credit. Complete proprietary school programs average between $700 and $900.

But what about quality of instruction? Can a correspondence student realistically expect to achieve the same results as a student who is

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taught in the classroom? According to a number of major research studies, correspondence students do just as well as, and sometimes better than, resident students who studied the same subject.

Many educational prognosticators foresee tremendous growth in correspondence education in the years ahead. Currently the number of home study admissions is growing by 15% to 20% each year while college enrollments on campus appear to be declining.

Two kinds of schools

Whether your reason for thinking about a home study course is prompted by a need to get a college education inexpensively, a desire to upgrade job skills or change career, or a lack of time for classroom sessions, you have two broad categories of schools to choose from: proprietary and postsecondary.

Proprietary schools include privately owned, profit-making schools that provide home study courses of a technical or vocational nature. A cross section of courses offered by proprietary schools includes the basics of writing and mathematics as well as the unconventional, such as yacht designing, doll hospital operations and beginning zookeeping.

The postsecondary category generally includes public and private colleges and universities that offer home study courses, some of which can lead to a degree.

There is some overlap between these two categories. A handful of proprietary schools offer programs through which students can earn an associate or bachelor's degree, and some postsecondary institutions offer noncredit, vocationally oriented courses via mail.

It is the proprietary schools that have had to struggle the most to overcome a poor public image. The stigma of private-eye lessons and matchbook advertising dies hard, even when schools can boast of such notable alumni as TV newsman Walter Cronkite and *Peanuts* cartoonist Charles Schulz.

Despite the stringent shaking-out

FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are a number of publications that can help you find schools and courses that best meet your needs. Some of these books and pamphlets can be found at public libraries.

- *Guide to External Degree Programs in the United States,* edited by Eugene J. Sullivan. One hundred colleges and universities that offer external degree programs are outlined in this book published by the American Council on Education. For each school the book lists such pertinent information as types of degrees and areas of study offered, accreditation, number of external degrees conferred and type of credits offered for prior learning. The cost is $16.95 plus $1.50 postage. Order from MacMillan Publishing Co., 866 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.
- *The Independent Study Catalog,* published for the National University Continuing Education Association. Correspondence courses offered by 72 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada are cataloged in this popular guide, which contains more than 12,000 different courses in more than 1,000 subject areas. Order by sending $7.20 to Peterson's Guides, Dept. 3702, P.O. Box 2123, Princeton, N.J. 09540.
- *NHSC 1982–83 Directory of Accredited Home Study Schools,* published by the National Home Study Council. This free pamphlet lists the 75 proprietary schools accredited by NHSC and hundreds of the courses they offer. Write to NHSC, 1601 Eighteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.
- *There's a School in Your Mailbox: A Book on Home Study,* by Dr. G. Howard Poteet. A guide to home study education, this 114-page book can help you select the right correspondence school. It costs $4 and may be purchased from the NHSC at the address listed above.
- *Your College Degree: The External Degree Way,* by William C. Haponski, Sandra G. Haponski and Charles E. McCabe. This 30-page booklet can help you decide whether you should enroll in an external degree program. Order by sending $3 to ETC Associates, Box 118-F, Oneida, N.Y. 13421.

process proprietary schools have undergone in the past few years, there are some schools that still employ unethical practices. Be particularly wary of schools that guarantee job placements or use nonexistent "scholarships" as a come-on to sign up for their courses. You should also be skeptical of any proprietary school that advertises in classified help-wanted sections under the guise of a job-training department for one or more employers.

To avoid disreputable businesses when seeking a course of study, first check the school's accreditation. The National Home Study Council's independent Accrediting Commission examines and decides whether to certify schools that voluntarily apply for accreditation. However, the lack of such accreditation does not automatically imply a school is unethical or incompetent; a number of perfectly reputable schools have not applied for accreditation from NHSC.

Schools that do become accredited have met strict standards that require a competent faculty, educationally sound and up-to-date courses, a careful screening process for student admissions, demonstrated student success and satisfaction, truthful advertising and adequate financial resources to deliver high-quality educational service.

Of the estimated 375 proprietary schools now operating, 75 of them hold NHSC accreditation.

If you can find what you want to study only at a school that's not accredited, check it out through the local Better Business Bureau or the state department of education.

"Try to find out how solid a school is financially, how it's funded, how long it has been in business, what kind of state license it has, the number of graduates it has turned out and how many of them have been employed," suggests Michael Lambert, assistant director of NHSC.

Lambert thinks that within the next 20 years or so electronic mail will make a dramatic impact on the way courses are administered, but for now 95% of all lessons rely on the printed page. Some schools augment their courses with audio cassettes and toll-free telephone lines for direct contact with instructors.

Some courses by their very nature

Studying accounting in her living room *gives Gail Frye of Bloomington, Ind., more time with her family. Long hours as an assistant corporate secretary left her no time for night school, but correspondence study through Indiana University allows her one year to complete each course.*

must combine residence training with home study. Tractor trailer driving courses and heavy equipment operator courses are two examples.

Getting a degree

If you are interested primarily in getting a college degree, you may be able to use correspondence courses from postsecondary institutions to earn an external degree.

External degrees are often based partly on the idea that adults accumulate knowledge in a variety of ways other than conventional classroom education. Often that knowledge can be translated into college credits through proficiency examinations, such as the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), or by other kinds of testing. You may be able to combine these credits with credits earned in a variety of other ways (prior college work, correspondence courses, military schools, for example) and get an external degree within a relatively short time.

One of the more forward-looking concepts in the home study field is the "open university" format offered by the National University Consortium (NUC). The consortium, through a nationwide network of four-year colleges and cooperating TV broadcast outlets, provides television-assisted courses that can lead to a bachelor's degree.

NUC has been operating since 1980 and currently serves 20 colleges and 22 TV stations that are beaming courses to students in 14 states as well as Canada. For information about this program, write to the National University Consortium, P.O. Box 430, Owings Mills, Md. 21117.

Most institutions offering external degree programs provide legitimate educational services. There are, however, some exceptions.

Many legitimate external degree programs are quite liberal in granting credits. Sometimes, though, persons eager to gain a degree in a hurry fall prey to "diploma mills," whose main requirement is that your check not bounce. Such organizations do little more than vend phony sheepskins for substantial fees.

A sting-type operation aimed at phony mail-order colleges across the nation was unveiled by the FBI last spring when it sought indictment of 38 degree-granting "diploma mills" in eight states.

The operation, nicknamed "Dipscam," was a three-year undercover

investigation by five FBI agents. They purchased a total of 23 degrees, including degrees for medical doctors and psychiatrists, for doing little more than sending the schools in question large sums of money. Costs ranged from $1,000 for a bachelor's degree to $5,000 for a doctorate.

Schools under investigation were located in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and South Carolina. None had classrooms, and some consisted only of a post office box or an answering service.

As with proprietary schools, the best way to avoid shady postsecondary enterprises is to be certain the program is certified by a reputable accrediting agency. You can do this by visiting a library and consulting either *Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs,* issued annually by the U.S. Department of Education, or *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education,* published each year by the American Council on Education for the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation.

What employers think

How do personnel officers in business and industry feel about a résumé that lists an external degree? Dr. William C. Haponski, an adult-education consultant and author of *Your College Degree: The External Degree Way* (see box), says this type of credential is growing steadily in acceptance and probably will be universally respected in the near future.

C. Marvin Mandery, director of personnel for the 10,000-employee parent company of General Mills, says he makes no distinction between an external degree and one earned by more traditional means. "As long as it's from an accredited, degree-granting school," Mandery says, "we will recognize it."

According to Haponski, a number of today's external degree graduates report that their employers readily accepted their credentials and evidently hold such education in high regard. Employers tell him that someone who has earned an external degree is likely to possess a high level of determination and initiative and have demonstrated the ability to carry out assigned responsibilities with a minimum of supervision. □